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ABBOT WALLINGFORD

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE CHARGES MADE
AGAINST HIM AND HIS MONKS

ABBOT GASQUET, D.D.




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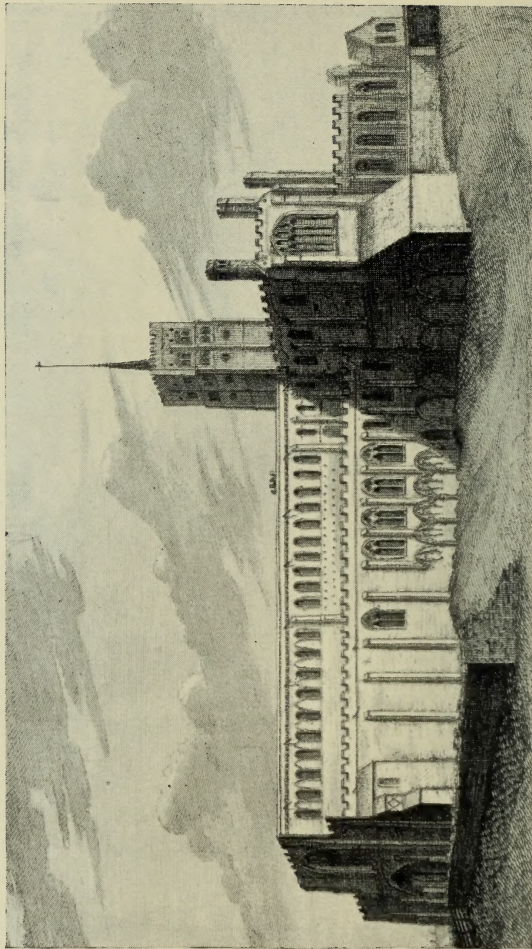
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June 1912

ABBOT WALLINGFORD



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St. Alban's Abbey in the Sixteenth Century.

From an old engraving by Samuel and Nathl. Buck.

ABBOT WALLINGFORD

*AN ENQUIRY INTO THE CHARGES MADE
AGAINST HIM AND HIS MONKS*

BY

ABBOT GASQUET, D.D.

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Abbot Wallingford.

THE visitor who takes his stand in the choir of St. Albans Abbey Church, is at once attracted by the massive and elegant altar screen which occupies the whole western end. It is, indeed, from every point of view a remarkable object, and with the exception of the similar screen at Winchester, from which, indeed, it was copied, it must be considered one of the most remarkable English architectural creations of the 15th century. It is an excellent specimen of perpendicular work executed with great taste. Tier upon tier, statues of saints, set in elaborately canopied niches, rise to the very roof of the chancel, and, in the days before the desecration of the 16th century,

when the centre of all was the great silver crucifix with the jewelled retable and hanging pyx, the St. Albans' screen must have been a sight never to be forgotten. Even now, in its partially restored condition, it rivets the attention, and is pointed out as a worthy monument to the man who built it—William Wallingford, Abbot of this great Benedictine abbey for sixteen years, from 1476 to 1492. As the visitor studies this work of beauty he must recall the fact that art is a finer and more subtle expression of the inmost soul even than words; and that of arts, architecture is not the least in power to reveal the mind of the architect and builder. "Can the same stream send forth waters both sweet and bitter?" exclaimed the late Mr. J. S. Brewer. "Are the higher realizations of artistic beauty . . . compatible with the disordering, vulgar and noisy pursuits of an unscrupulous avarice or ambition? Will men that gather meanly scatter nobly? Will any magic convert the

sum total of sordid actions into greatness of any kind?"¹

With this leading principle, although the tomb of Abbot Wallingford was in the chapel he had prepared near by, on the south side of the high altar, his real monument has always been regarded as the wonderful screen he set up, which recalled the memory and name of a great and good ruler; a man whose work attested the nobility of his character and the greatness of his ideas.

Quite recently we have been asked to change our estimate of Abbot William of Wallingford. He has been at rest for more than four centuries, and his name has been respected and honoured even by those who had destroyed much of what he loved so well; and now, in the withering spirit of modern criticism which loves to dethrone idols and white-wash the shadiest characters of history, some writers would seek to obtain a

¹ J. S. Brewer, *Giraldus Camb.*, Pref. p. xxx.

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reversal of the usual judgment about Wallingford. They would have us believe that, so far from the Abbot being a great man and a good ruler, he was in reality a miserable self-seeker, a liar, a perjurer and a thief, who brought his house to a condition of dishonour and ruin. Are we to believe this? What do we really know of the life of William of Wallingford?

William was a native of the village of Wallingford, the centre of which was the small Priory or cell dependent upon the Abbey of St. Albans. He and his elder brother, Thomas, entered the Order early in life, and as they are generally enumerated in the community lists together, probably at the same time. This would probably have been towards the close of Abbot Whethamstede's first period of office, which came to an end in 1440 by his resignation. John Stoke, the Prior of Wallingford, was chosen to succeed him, and partly probably be-

cause he would have known the two Wallingfords well before becoming Abbot, partly, no doubt, because he recognised the great abilities of the younger brother, William, we find them occupied early in their lives in official positions at St. Albans. On the death of Abbot Stoke on 14th December 1451, the elder, Thomas Wallingford, was senior chaplain to the Abbot, an office of great trust and responsibility ; and his brother William held the offices of archdeacon, cellarer, bursar forester and sub-cellarer of the Abbey. The capacity as an administrator displayed by the latter was evidently so great that, although at that time he can have been comparatively only a young man, he was seriously suggested as a candidate for the abbatial office. Both he and the Prior, William Albon, the second name suggested, refused to entertain the notion, and Abbot Whethamstede was unanimously requested once more to take office. This was on 16th January 1452 ; and throughout his

second abbacy Whethamstede continued to employ Wallingford in offices of trust, such as "official general," chamberlain, and archdeacon.¹ This fact is perhaps the best answer to the grave charges brought against Wallingford with much detail and at great length in the so-called "Register" of the second abbacy.²

As this book has been recently relied upon to discredit William Wallingford, something must be said concerning it. Though called a "Register of the Abbot John Whethamstede," it differs entirely from the other monastic Registers of St. Albans. The writer does not even claim that it is an official record of acts, but a setting forth of some few facts in the second prelacy of Abbot John Whethamstede according to the method of a registrar.³ The writer was bitterly

¹ Reg. J. Whethamstede I. 5, 173, &c.

² *Ibid.* pp. 102-135.

³ Hic prælaturæ Wethamstede pauca secundæ more registrantis scribuntur gesta Johannis. (*Ibid.* p. 5.)

opposed to William Wallingford. This is obvious. His method of writing history is curious. He composed the speeches of the actors in the events he describes, even when the interviews he relates are of the most private nature, and he interlards the supposed speeches with quotations both classical and biblical. On the face of it, the so-called register, though including facts, is a composition dictated by spite and a determination to destroy the career of Wallingford. "Again and again," writes Mr. Riley, the editor, "he is accused of lying, and of habitual perjury even; and of theft too, of the most iniquitous description, in having appropriated the moneys of the late Abbot to satisfy the cravings of an innate cupidity, which had characterised him even from childhood. His nefariousness and subtlety are enlarged upon, his pomposity and verbosity are derided, his overheard lamentations are sneered at, his self-communings and most secret thoughts,

which must have been known to no one but himself, are professedly brought to light. Judas and Gehazi, Simon Magus and Ananias, are set forth as his prototypes, and he is accused, in a spirit of covetousness which might have animated the veriest usurer, of sacrificing even unto devils. And not content even with this, the writer extends the nefarious charge of stealing the late Abbot's savings, and of committing perjury to conceal the theft, to the Archdeacon's brother, Thomas Walingforde, who was Abbot Whethamstede's senior chaplain as well. . . . In the cause of truth and honour, good feeling and good faith, we have no option left but to believe that this narrative, whatever the foundation on which it may have been based, so far from being written by the Abbot, never even came before his eyes."¹

The Abbot again, it may be remarked, is frequently spoken of in

¹ *Ibid.* Introd. pp. xv.-xvi.

terms of extravagant laudation, which it is hardly probable that he himself would have committed to writing; any more than that he would have penned the statement that by "solid, sober and sensible men" his predecessor was pronounced to be "lazy, sluggish, and odious to nearly all."

The writer adds, "The scandalous attacks upon the character of William Walingforde and his brother would, as already suggested, find no place in the Abbot's Register. Derived from some source which it is now as difficult even to surmise as it is wholly out of the reach of our knowledge, this structure of calumny and vituperation, based, may be, upon some slight fragment of fact, was devised for a purpose which, though not avowed, it is not so very difficult to divine."¹

¹ It is upon the evidence of this document that Mr. Froude entirely relies for the account of the state of St. Albans in the 15th century given in his *Short Studies*, III. pp. 119-126. His picture is as truthful

In this verdict as to the worthlessness of the so-called Register as sober history, the writer in the *Dictionary of National Biography* of the account of William Wallingford, entirely agrees. "They"—that is these infamous charges and suggestions, says the *Dictionary*—"They are, however, evidently an interpolation, probably by a monk jealous of Wallingford, and Whethamstede not only took no notice of these accusations, but continued Wallingford in all his offices."

According to the story told in these calumnious additions to Whethamstede's Register, the foundation of the charges rested upon the story of Abbot Stoke's deathbed. His last illness came upon him at his Manor of Titenhanger,¹ and on as the document; and if, with the Editor, Mr. Riley, we regard the so-called Register as a "calumnious attack," which should "find no place in the Abbot's Register," we may equally dismiss Mr. Froude's picturesque pages as fiction perhaps founded "on some slight fragment of fact, and certainly no part of the true Annals of an English Abbey." "

¹ Reg. I. p. 115.

the news reaching St. Albans, the Prior, Archdeacon, Sacrist and Almoner came to him. These, to give them their names, were William Albon, afterwards Abbot in succession to Whethamstede; William Wallingford, John Wylly and Richard Russell. In the presence of the rest the Prior is supposed to have addressed his dying Abbot in a set-speech on his tendency to accumulate wealth. The Abbot, understanding from this that his end was drawing near, admitted that he had saved a thousand marks, which he intended to go for the purchase of a large bell, to pay for the glazing of the cloister, and for a new pavement. Being further questioned, so the story goes, about this thousand marks, the dying man is supposed to have declared that it would be found in a chest in the dormitory under the care of William Wallingford and his brother, Thomas Wallingford, the Abbot's senior chaplain. After the Abbot's death, however, on search being made

for the money, only 250 marks could be found in the late Abbot's purse, the two Wallingfords declaring on oath that they knew of no other money. This is the story, and in the sequel it is made out that William Wallingford and his brother were suspected, not only by the Prior, but by Abbot Whethamstede after his election, as well as by others who were examined on the matter, of having stolen the savings of Abbot Stoke. There is this much truth in the story, that Abbot Stoke did leave money to carry out the works mentioned above. His obituary notice says: "Whilst lying in bed dying, he left behind him, by his own wish, those moneys with which was purchased the great bell, which (after him) is called *John*. [He also left] money for the new glazing of the cloister, and before he died he purchased the beautiful gold cloth of red colour, and directed that it should be used to cover the corpses of dead brethren on the funeral days, as is now done."

It has been the custom to look upon Abbot Stoke as a squanderer of the property of St. Albans, since there is little to show as his special work for the house : further, that during his short reign the years were years of plenty, and his revenues must have been proportionately great ; nevertheless, that he left St. Albans much impoverished and in great debt, to the dismay of his successor, who was greatly hampered in the undertakings he wished to carry out by the improvident management of Abbot Stoke. For all these ideas the so-called Register is alone responsible, and there is ample evidence that they are false, like the rest of the calumnious suggestions of the anonymous writer.

One work of considerable expense was certainly carried out by Abbot Stoke. It has been the custom to credit his successor—Abbot Whethamstede—with the building of the tomb for the great benefactor of the Abbey, Humphrey Duke of Glou-

cester. But the Duke died during Stoke's abbacy, and the obituary notice of the Abbot specially declares that he built (*fabricari faciebat*) the monument.¹ What that cost we may judge from the memorandum printed in the *Monasticon*.² "First the abbot and convent of the said monasterie have payed for makying of the tombe and place of sepulture of the said duke within the said monasterie above the summe of £433 : 6 : 8."

When Abbot Whethamstede succeeded John Stoke at the unanimous wish of the Community, he was an old but still vigorous man. He quickly experienced considerable difficulties relating to the privileges and legal exemptions of the monastery, which amongst other things involved the necessity of suing for one of those general pardons from the Crown which were common in those times, but which are difficult to understand. In

¹ MS. Cott., Nero D. VII. f. 36.

² II. p. 202, *note*.

1455 the King, Henry VI., is made to forgive amongst other things, "all treasons, murders, rape of women, felonies, conspiracies, &c., &c.," which had been committed by the Abbot and Convent of St. Albans before the 9th day of July (1453).¹ Of course no one will seriously maintain that these terrible crimes thus forgiven by the king, and to which, by the fact that this pardon was sued for, the Abbot and his brethren had tacitly at least pleaded guilty, were in fact committed. It is admitted that such sweeping charges were often made at this time, and, as in this case, tacitly admitted, so as to require a royal pardon for every possible offence. In this way security was attained, and the royal exchequer was replenished. Twice during his short rule Abbot Whethamstede was compelled to take out such a general pardon from the Court of Chancery.² These, however, need not be taken as evidence of any fearful and

¹ *Ut sup.* l. 195 *seqq.*

² *Ibid.* p. 291.

awful crimes committed at this time by the Abbot and Convent of St. Albans. It is allowed on all hands that such charges, such admissions, were mere legal fictions to enable the law officers of the Crown to get people into their hands. The pardon was merely drawn up in a general stereotyped form, and had no reference to actualities.

So far from there being any evidence of the impoverished state of St. Albans at the beginning of Whethamstede's second abbacy, everything that we know for certain points to the opposite conclusion. "Immediately after his installation"¹ he started building the library for which he had prepared much material during his first term of office. In his second year he completed the building, and on the shell he spent more than £150. Besides this, on the masonry, lead work, glazing, shelves and desks he spent much more. He then took in hand the rebuilding of

¹ *Ibid.* p. 423.

the bakehouse which was in a ruinous condition. When he had finished, he had expended some £205 on the work, not including the food and drink of the workmen; but he had the satisfaction of believing "that there was no more elegant building in the whole kingdom."¹

It is interesting here to note that Abbot Whethamstede carried out these works and expended all this money "through Brother William Wallingford,"² then his official," or man of business. The interest lies in the fact that it is suggested by the scurrilous writer of the so-called Register that it was precisely during this period of his abbacy that Whethamstede was charging Wallingford with theft, falsifying accounts and perjury, &c., which is hardly consistent with employing him in this office of trust as a good and faithful servant.

It is both interesting and useful to note that, in contradiction to the suggested

¹ *Ibid.* p. 424. Cott. MS., Nero D. VII., f. 36.

² *Ibid.*

poverty and ruin of the St. Albans' finances by the peculations and misappropriations of William Wallingford, the long list of benefactions, &c. to St. Albans, made by Whethamstede during his second abbacy, extending over many pages of the Obit Book, is three times at least as long as that of any other Abbot. It includes the making of his own tomb, and the completion of a silver gilt altar retable—evidently a wonderful work of art—which, by the way, was also made in his second year spoken of above, and which cost £146 for workmanship, and on which was used 513 ounces of silver. Besides this Whethamstede was able to purchase estates and lands, to repair parish churches in the gift of the Convent, to provide altars and plate and organs, &c. &c., a record which gives no indication of financial difficulties.

All the time William Wallingford was the Abbot's official. Right at the close of his abbacy, when it was necessary to

send some discreet man of business to carry out a delicate negotiation with Lord Sudely, once in 1460, and again in 1461, on the successful settlement, Abbot Whethamstede made choice of William Wallingford to conduct the business. When also, in 1464, the Abbot had to appoint a commission for the examination of people charged with heresy, the two monks chosen by him were the Prior and William Wallingford, the Archdeacon.

Abbot Whethamstede died on 20th January 1465, and on the following 25th of February William Albon, the then Prior, was chosen to succeed. After his installation he appointed to the high and responsible office of Prior the former Archdeacon, William Wallingford. This choice is absolutely inexplicable if we credit the statements of the so-called Register. It must be remembered that it was this Abbot himself—William Albon, who, as Prior, had taken part in the supposed death scene of Abbot Stoke, and

had subsequently charged William Wallingford of theft and perjury to Abbot Whethamstede; and yet it was this very man whom he chose out of the whole Community to be his *alter ego* and to share his cares and responsibilities in the administration of St. Albans. Moreover, if we are to put any trust in the statements of the so-called Register, John Wyllly and Richard Russell, who are also said to have witnessed the death-bed scene, were still alive as seniors at the top of the Community, and would surely have protested against such an appointment as that of their discredited and criminal brother to the highest office in the Abbey. Yet this is the record of the appointment in the Register: "Memorandum that on the 18th day of March (1465), the feast of St. Edward the King, the Lord Abbot, with the common assent of his brethren, at the time of Chapter usual in this Monastery, created Dom William Wallingford, his Archdeacon, Prior of the said

Monastery. He was conducted to his stall in the choir between Dom Thomas Luton, sub-prior and precentor of the Monastery, and Dom Nicholas Lychefeld, the third prior."

During the years of William Albon's Abbacy—that is from 1465 to 1476—at least four canonical visitations of the Abbey "in spirituals and temporals" must have been made by Abbots appointed for that purpose by the Benedictine General Chapters. These meetings were held as nearly as possible every three years, and, as part of the necessary business of the Fathers, choice was made of a President General, whose duty it was to see that the statutes and regulations were carried out, and of Visitors to go personally to examine into the state of the various abbeys and priories of the Order. Such an examination was no mere formality. Notice of the advent of the Visitor was given beforehand, and all were warned to be present and give evidence on their

conscience of their knowledge of anything amiss in the government of the house in the way of mal-administration of temporals, laxity of government, or decay of spiritual interests. To elicit information of anything which needed correction, sets of questions were drawn up to be answered by the individual members of the Community.

In this way, at a General Chapter of the Benedictines of the South Province, held at Northampton in 1464, the Abbot of Peterborough was appointed to visit the monasteries of Black Monks in the diocese of Lincoln. In fulfilment of this duty he wrote on the 4th June 1465 to say that he would be at St. Albans on June 25th to commence the visitation. He required the Abbot to inform all who ought to be present, and to let him know the names of those he had summoned.¹ Abbot William Albon acknowledged the letter, and submitting himself and

¹ Reg., *ut sup.*, II. p 47.

his house "humbly" to the Visitor, and he enclosed the list of the monks of his Abbey who should present themselves.¹

Another Chapter was held three years later, in 1467, and at this the Abbot of Eynesham was made the canonical Visitor of the Monasteries in this district. He gave notice that he would fulfil this duty on 21st April 1468, and was welcomed and received in the same way as the previous General Visitor had been.² The number of monks examined at this time would have been between fifty and sixty.³ Other Chapters were held in 1471 and 1473, which would have been followed as usual by the regular visitation and examination. In the last of these Chapters the Abbot of St. Albans was elected as Visitor to Glastonbury, and being unable to go there himself he

¹ *Ibid.* p. 48.

² *Ibid.* p. 76.

³ In 1380 the number of the St. Albans Community was 53 and 2 novices.—Obit Book. Cott. MS., Nero D. VII. f. 81b.

deputed two of his monks to act for him in May 1474.¹

So far as there is evidence, it is possible to assert that the Monastery of St. Albans was at this period in as flourishing a state as the circumstances of the times would allow. There is no sign whatever of any want of vigilance over either temporals or spirituals, and members continued to receive the habit and be professed as monks of the Abbey. Thus in 1466 four were given the monastic tonsure, and the following year four were professed and six received the habit. William of Wallingford remained the *alter ego* of the Abbot during all the eleven years of his rule. In 1473 he was, with others, appointed to make the visitation of the various vicars and curates of the town of St. Albans.

All this time money and care was expended upon the repair and beautifying of the house. Abbot Albon's obituary

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 117-118.

notice speaks of his having furnished his Monastery with vestments, books and ornaments to the value of six hundred marks. He also purchased lands and tenements adding to the revenues of the Abbey to the amount of one hundred marks annually, and he built two apartments in stone for the cellarer and bursar of the establishment.

The Register thus records the death and burial of Abbot Albon. “Memorandum—on the first day of the month of July 1476¹—the dominical letter being F.—Master William Albon, Doctor of Laws, late Abbot of St. Albans, closed the last day of his life in the room named ‘the Cloke Chamber’ within the Monastery of St. Albans about eight in the evening. He was interred with all solemnity by the Reverend Father in Christ, John Hunden, Bishop of Landaff, on the Friday next following, before the feretry of St. Amphibalus, in the foresaid Monastery

¹ This, in 1476, was a Monday.

May God be merciful to his soul.
Amen."

It devolved immediately on William Wallingford to arrange for the election of a successor to the deceased Abbot. On the day of the funeral, therefore, he despatched two monks to ask the royal permission to proceed; and having obtained this, he summoned the priors of the various cells to come and take part in the election. This was fixed for the 5th of August, and on that day sixty monks (four by proxy), all of whom were in Sacred Orders, met together in the Chapter House to choose their Superior. Besides the actual resident community, the electors comprised the priors of eight priories or cells dependent upon St. Albans. These obviously must have formed a very valuable body of experienced men, apart from the Community, who were capable of advising and influencing the election, and if need be in the right direction. As was usual, two notaries and

Masters in the Law were present as "directors and advisers" to the electors, who had gathered together in the Chapter House. The leaf of the Register containing the details of the election is missing; but the royal writ under the Privy Seal furnishes the information that the electors chose William Wallingford for their Abbot "unanimously" ¹ (*unanimiter*) and "*per Spiritus Sancti viam*," i.e. by acceptance by the whole Community without any scrutiny of votes.² This result is clearly a complete refutation of the charges made against William Wallingford in the pages of the so-called Register. Had he been the thief, liar, perjurer, &c., suggested by the anonymous slanderer, it is impossible to conceive that a body of sixty men, more than one-half of whom had known

¹ Reg. *ut sup.* f. 155. Mr. Riley (I. Intro. p. xix.) did not notice this statement, for he writes, "As to the degree of unanimity in reference to his election which prevailed among the inmates of the Convent, it is impossible to speak."

² *Obituary notice*, Reg. 1. App. D. p. 477.

Wallingford before the election of Whet-
hamstede in 1452¹—that is for twenty-six
years—and eight of whom were men of
independent positions, as priors of the
various cells attached to the Abbey, could
have all agreed to make choice of so
undesirable and shady a character. They
could not all have been men without
conscience and despicable hypocrites; and
this they would have been had they
solemnly attended the Mass of the Holy
Ghost to beg the guidance of the Holy
Spirit on their choice, and after listening
to the reading of the *Quia propter*, which
recalled their serious obligations in con-
science and before God, made choice of
an unworthy Abbot to rule over them.

¹ From a comparison of the three lists of the Com-
munity given in the Register (I. p. 11; II. pp. 27, 145) it
may be seen that from 1452 to 1476 some twenty-four
religious had died, so that thirty-three who were present
at Wallingford's election would have been also present at
Whethamstede's in 1452. During twenty-eight years the
yearly average of deaths at St. Albans would appear
to be about 1·6, and the yearly increase during the
same period about 2·1.

During the abbacy of Wallingford, St. Albans apparently prospered and its numbers increased in normal proportions. In the first four years there were some eighteen names added to the list of the Community, five of whom were novices. In 1477 six monks were professed and eight received the habit. In 1480 Abbot Wallingford was appointed by the Benedictine General Chapter to visit all the religious houses in the diocese of Lincoln,¹ and in the same year St. Albans was visited by the Abbot of Westminster² in person, and all the religious examined as to the spiritual and temporal condition of the Abbey and as to their knowledge of anything which stood in need of correction. The next General Chapter was held in 1481, and according to the triennial rule this was followed by others in 1484 and 1487. Visitations, therefore, were probably held in 1484 or 1485 and in 1488.

¹ Reg. *ut sup.* II. p. 220.

² *Ibid.* p. 228.

In the year 1484 something in the nature of an attack upon the good name of Abbot Wallingford seems to have been made at some time or other, possibly in this visitation. At any rate, it must clearly have been to answer accusations of a serious nature against his character and administration that the Prior and Community were prompted to draw up their declaration about their Abbot, which subsequently was incorporated in his obituary notice.

After stating all that he had done for his Community in the various offices he had held, the document concludes: "And in testimony of all the foresaid things, and as a bright example of future ages, we, Thomas Ramridge, Prior, and the other Fathers and brethren, Conventuals of this Monastery, signify the truth of this to all men by our common seal: and by the unanimous consent of all and the assent of each individual, by this writing testify that all these things were lovingly and

kindly done and carried out by this best of Fathers, 8th August, A.D. 1484.”¹

Whilst it is of course impossible to tell what really prompted this general expression of loyalty and affection to Abbot Wallingford in 1484, what can be said with some degree of certainty is that it was called forth by some attack upon him, which the Community thought calumnious and untrue. The only attack of this kind as to which we have any knowledge is that contained in the so-called Register, and it is perfectly possible that either at the time of visitation or in some other way the Community may have become acquainted with the fact that this precious composition existed under the colour of being a Register of Abbot Whethamstede. The mention of certain monks as having been present at the deathbed scene of Abbot Stoke would almost certainly have prevented its use or production in the lifetime of the supposed

¹ Reg. I., App. D., p. 479.

three witnesses against Wallingford. By 1484, Abbot (formerly Prior) Albon, John Wylly and Richard Russell were all dead, and Abbot Wallingford alone remained; so that the time was propitious to make use of this production, evidently aimed at destroying the character of Wallingford. If it were used at this time it would be a perfect explanation of the document drawn up by the Prior and Community to give it the lie direct.

During the early years of his rule, Wallingford had something to say to the two convents of Pray and Sopwell, at or near St. Albans and under his jurisdiction. In 1480 Elizabeth Baroun, the Prioress of Pray, resigned her office by reason of her increasing infirmities, which prevented her governing her house. Abbot Wallingford appointed Dom John Rothbury, Archdeacon, and Dom Thomas Ramridge, the Subprior, to examine and ratify the election of a successor in the person of



Drawn by E. Blore.

Engraved by J. Le Keux.

Ancient Piscina on the South Side of the Nave of
St. Alban's Abbey Church.

Dame Alice Wafer.¹ In 1481 he sent the same two monks to hold a visitation at the Convent of Sopwell. They were directed to inquire fully into the state of the house, both in spirituals and temporals, with full powers to depose, appoint, cite, suspend and excommunicate any of whatever state, grade or dignity they might be, should such a course be deemed necessary. The Prioress and each nun is ordered under holy obedience to appear before the Visitors and give evidence. The Prioress, Dame Johanna Chapelle, being old and too infirm to govern, is to be relieved of her office, and one Dame Elizabeth Webbe is to be installed in her place.

Abbot Wallingford, since the time of holding the office of archdeacon under Whethamstede, had shown his interest in education. Ramridge, his successor as Abbot, says of him that he became distinguished for his care of students, assigning the money necessary to train

¹ Reg., *ut sup.*, p. 222.

ten young monks. He was appointed by General Chapter to consider the best selection for superior of the monks studying at Oxford ; and from the list drawn up for the visitation in 1480 it appears that three of his young monks were at the university. One of these, John Maynard, supplicated for his D.D. in 1507, and was then Prior of Gloucester College.¹ At the same time, among the Community there was a Doctor of Canon Law, a Doctor in Theology and a Bachelor also of Theology,² whilst by the death of Abbot Albon, St. Albans had lost another Doctor in Canon Law.

A point of general interest is the connection of St. Albans at this time with the introduction of printing. The subject is somewhat obscure, but what is certain is, that between 1480 and 1486, the unknown printer of St. Albans issued eight works from the press. This was in the

¹ Boase, *Register of the Univ. of Oxford*, I. p. 53.

² *Ibid.* p. 36.

time of Abbot Wallingford, and it is impossible to suppose that with his love for learning he did not know about this new wonderful help for studies, even if, as it is difficult to suppose, he did not actively support and encourage the invention, especially if the printer was the Abbey schoolmaster. All that is certainly known about this printer is, that in Wynkyn de Worde's reprint of the *St. Albans Chronicle*, the colophon states: "Here endith this present chronicle compiled in a book, and also emprinted by one sometime schoolmaster of St. Alban."

The writer of Wallingford's biographical notice in the *Dictionary of National Biography* says: "There is no clear proof of any closer relation between Wallingford and the schoolmaster of St. Alban than between John Esteney, Abbot of Westminster, and William Caxton, who worked under the shadow of Westminster Abbey. Yet the probabilities of close connection in a little place like St. Albans between

the Abbot, who was keenly interested in education, and the schoolmaster, who was furthering education by the printing of books, are in themselves great, and are confirmed by the fact that two of the eight books printed between 1480 and 1486 bear the arms of the town."

It has been remarked by Mr. Riley¹ that the Registers of Abbots Albon and Wallingford "in many of their details" afford "a striking illustration of the state of helpless decrepitude and decadence into which the monastic system in this country had fallen for near a century before the time when its doom was finally accomplished; and showing that it was to no small extent its own internal shortcomings that, in combination with the evil passions of an unprincipled sovereign, and the greed of his even more unprincipled creatures, contributed to precipitate its fall." The indications of this "helpless decrepitude

¹ Reg. II. Introd. xxiv.

and decadence" which Mr. Riley sees are apparently the gifts of the next presentations of rectories impropriated to St. Albans, in return for services rendered to the Abbey. These no doubt are numerous, but it is somewhat difficult to understand what is particularly wrong about the transactions; and in view of the very troubled times and the many changes in the political history of the period it seems that these "rewards for services" may have been the best, if not almost the necessary means of safeguarding the interests of the Abbey.

In consequence of these troubled times also, the many changes in the lay officials of the Abbey were probably politic and necessary. Why, for example, Abbot Wallingford's grant in 1479 to Lord Hastings "of the office" of Seneschal "by reason of the singular love (he) hath heretofore borne us and our Church, and which we trust in future he will bear," should be regarded as evidence

of "decadence," is difficult to understand.

With regard to the frequent manumissions of the bond-men of the Abbot, which characterised this period in the history of St. Albans, it might naturally have been supposed that this "freeing of the slave" would have been accounted as an act of generosity and put to the credit of the Abbot. But, when Abbot Albon freed bond-men and their families and apparently exacted a fine or composition for doing so, it is suggested that his object was to make money for himself out of the transaction,¹ whilst, when Abbot Wallingford exacts no consideration for manumissions of later date, we are told that it looks "as if the Abbot was only too happy to be rid of the presence of persons who had claims upon him as a landowner," no wonder that the writer in the *Dictionary of National Biography* thinks that "Mr. Riley, in

² *Ibid.* p. xxxiv.

his introduction to the second volume of Whethamstede's 'Chronicle' is, however, unduly severe in his interpretation of many of Wallingford's acts."

The fact is sometimes overlooked that, situated so near the capital and on a much frequented road, the Abbey of St. Albans underwent many vicissitudes in the troubles which at various times afflicted the country. At this particular period in the 15th century, the Abbey, perhaps for its peace, was too deeply committed to one party of those contending for the crown, and that not the ultimately successful side on the field of Bosworth. Richard III. had been the friend and patron of the Abbey: a thing which would have been remembered against it when Henry VII. came to the throne. The situation was extraordinary, and a passage from Dr. Gairdner's Preface to *Letters, etc., Richard III., Henry VII.*,¹ best explains the dangers

¹ II. p. xxxi.

which the adherents of the defeated cause ran. “He (Henry VII.) pretended to have been actually king even before his victory at Bosworth. His first parliament did not scruple to recognise this fiction, and passed an Act by which it appeared, not that Henry and his followers had rebelled against Richard, but that Richard and his followers had rebelled against Henry. Perhaps there never was such a blot on the English statute book. A notorious lie was deliberately enacted for the purpose of attainting the adherents of a defeated cause. It is true the number of attainders was not great, but the stretch of power even in that day was unprecedented. ‘O God!’ exclaims the prior of Croyland, ‘what security are our kings to have henceforth, that in the day of battle they may not be deserted by their subjects, who, acting on the lawful summons of a king, may on the decline of that king’s party, as is frequently the case, be bereft

of life and fortune and all their inheritance.' ”

The last years of the rule of Abbot Wallingford must for this reason have been difficult. For although the Abbey from the first necessarily accepted the king who had won his crown in 1485 on the field of Bosworth, the Abbot's friendship with Richard III. brought them within the terms of the Act which made the adherents of the fallen king rebels against Henry and liable to attainder. It is by no means improbable that the difficulties later experienced in the conflict between St. Albans and Archbishop Morton may in part have been due to politics. Morton was the ecclesiastical champion of Henry VII.: he had shared in the king's exile and was properly rewarded upon his triumph. His endeavour from the first was to secure for his royal master's title the sanction of the Pope, and it is more than probable that the ex-

tensive powers¹ of visitation of religious houses, asked for jointly by the king and archbishop, were suggested by the necessity of being assured of the entire submission of the English monastic houses. It has been conjectured that in the case of St. Albans the king was greatly displeased to find Catesby, the chief Seneschal of the Abbey, among the "traitors" at Bosworth.²

On receipt of these plenary powers of visitation, Archbishop Morton on 5th July 1490 sent what is called a "Monitio," or warning, to Abbot Wallingford of his intention to apply this authority to the case of St. Albans. He enclosed a copy of the Bull of Pope Innocent VIII., giving him power to visit all monasteries in England, and then says: "It has come to our notice by public report and by frequent relations of people worthy of credit, that you, the said Abbot, have

¹ Wilkin's *Concilia*, III. p. 630.

² Newcome, *Hist. of St. Albans*, p. 400.

long been and are noted for simony, usury, and for the spending and dilapidation of the goods and possessions of the said Monastery, as well as for other great crimes and excesses to be afterwards noted."

"Further, it is reported that under you regular observance and hospitality has decayed and is still decaying, so that the intentions of the pious founders of the Abbey are not carried out, and the ancient and regular method of life has been abandoned by many of your brethren, who have given themselves over to a reprobate sense." Then follow a series of the gravest charges against the moral character of one of the nuns of Pray and some of the monks; the name of one of the younger religious, Thomas Sudbury, being mentioned. Sopwell, too, had been put into the care of monks who have dissipated the property and brought it to ruin. The same has been done in regard to the property of the cells de-

pendent on St. Albans. As to the Abbey itself, Wallingford is charged, according to report, with getting rid of property and jewels, of cutting down the woods, and especially of selling all the oaks and timber trees to the value of 8000 marks. As to the monks, some are said to be given to every worldly evil; divine service is neglected, and some consort even within the monastery precincts with bad women; others purchase promotion by theft of chalices and church plate and jewels, even from the shrine of St. Alban itself. Report also accuses the Abbot of defending the evil doers, and humiliating and keeping in the background those of his Community who are good and desire to live in a religious manner.

Morton then goes on to say that before the reception of the papal Bull he had charitably called Abbot Wallingford's attention to the reported abuses, but that the Abbot had neglected to correct them. He now once more warns him

that he must correct what is amiss in his own life and that of his subjects. If he does not within thirty days certify the Archbishop that what is necessary is done, Morton warns him that, acting on the general powers given him in the Bull of Innocent VIII., he will himself come and hold a visitation.

This is the *Monitio*, or warning; and on the face of the document it professes to be merely the statement of reports, of the gravest nature it is true, but merely unproved reports against the good name of the Abbot and Convent. They are so sweeping and terrible that the whole is suggestive of the equally sweeping common form in which the "pardons" previously referred to are couched, and which, if they were to be accepted as absolutely true, would affect the characters and reputations of some of the most illustrious English ecclesiastics of the period.

The charges, or rather reports, set forth

by Morton, as will be seen, involve the person of Wallingford as well as the St. Albans Community in doubt and suspicion. And perhaps the most astonishing part of this astonishing document is the clause directing Wallingford to correct the supposed abuses himself. If Archbishop Morton himself believed one half of these reports, the Abbot was a man of utterly abandoned life; and to leave to him the correction of the supposed abuses was nothing short of a criminal neglect of the duty with which he was charged by the Bull of Innocent VIII. The Archbishop says that he had warned the Abbot before of what was being said, and that as he had paid no attention to the warning, he now repeats his "monition" with the additional authority given by the general powers of visitation he had received. It is clear, therefore, from the document, that the *Monitio* is not a record of what was found after enquiry, as Mr. Froude would have his readers

believe :¹ neither is it even a notification of any actual visitation which Archbishop Morton had determined to make, as some have stated. It purports to be merely a statement that grave reports were in circulation about the good name of the Abbot and Community, and under a threat of a personal visitation at some future time, an order is conveyed to Abbot Wallingford, who, if the tales reported by Morton were only partially true, was a hopelessly bad and incompetent man, himself to correct what was amiss.

With regard to the Convents of Pray and Sopwell, about which stories of the gravest nature are detailed, it may be recalled to the reader that in 1480 the strictest investigation had been made by two monks deputed by Wallingford, and in each case new superiors had been appointed to secure better discipline ; and

¹ *Short Studies*, III. p. 127. Mr. Froude says, "Cardinal Morton, after examination of witnesses, has left in his Register as the result of his enquiry," &c.

although in regard to the whole of these charges, or rather rumours, it is open to any one to believe them, it should be remembered that there is absolutely no proof that any single one of them is true in fact, and their face value is, at the worst, that they remain to this day "not proven" by any evidence whatsoever; whereas, as will appear presently, there is the distinct evidence of the Community that the reports were unfounded.

Rumours of some coming difficulties would probably at some time before the date of "monition," have called Abbot Wallingford's attention to the scandalous reports in circulation about St. Albans. The report that reached him must have suggested to the Abbot that some attack upon the Abbey and its privileges was in contemplation; and, as in duty bound by the oath of his office, he at once took measures to stop any infringement of these rights.

Before the close of 1489 he had despatched some of his Community to Rome

to beg for the protection of the Holy See. In fact, the obituary, so often referred to, gives the name of the monk who pleaded their cause at this time. This is the entry: "We ought not to forget what great expenses and heavy burdens he (*i.e.* Wallingford) bore in his old age when he strove with diligence against the Archbishop of Canterbury and High Chancellor of England (*i.e.* Morton) to defend the liberties and immunities of this monastery, and with great force strongly and manfully resisted his power, and appealed to Rome. He sent his monk John Thornton to Rome, and boldly cited the Archbishop and his Dean of Arches (to appear there). At length our best and most revered of Fathers and most worthy Abbot gained a truly just victory, and preserved all our privileges whole and untouched, to our great honour and utility. May God and St. Alban our Patron here and in all places be praised." ¹

¹ Reg., *ut sup.*, I. App. D. p. 478.

The victory here spoken of, as gained by Wallingford's agents in Rome, appears in the shape of a Brief from Pope Innocent VIII. addressed to Archbishop Morton on February 6th, 1490. The Pope in this, after declaring that St. Albans was a monastery exempt from all jurisdiction save that of the Pope himself, charges him (*i.e.* the Archbishop) with the duty of protecting its privileges and defending the Abbot and monks from all attacks upon them. This he is to do "out of respect for the Pope and the said Holy See—*quod erit et nobis gratum*,—which will also be pleasing to us." ¹

Before this document could have been received in England, Abbot Wallingford must clearly have had from Archbishop Morton that warning as to the reports in circulation about himself and St. Albans, which the latter says in his *Monitio* he had given him. Wallingford's agents in Rome would have been informed of the attitude

¹ Vat. Arch. Arm. xxxix. tom. 19, f. 270^b.

of the Archbishop and have been directed to acquaint the Holy See. Meanwhile, on July the 5th of this same year 1490, Morton issued his *Monitio*; and on the 11th of the same month it appears from the Roman archives that the St. Albans' proctor — no doubt the monk John Thornton — appeared in person before the Pope, and in the presence of one of the Cardinals presented a petition in the name of the Abbot and monks. In this was set forth the privileges of exemption from all Episcopal jurisdiction, which had been granted to the Abbey by previous Popes, and quite recently confirmed by His Holiness himself. Amongst these privileges was the exemption from all visitations except by properly appointed Legates of the Holy See, and even by these only when the Abbey was specifically named. To this exemption was coupled the right of appeal to the Pope in person when these privileges were attacked. The proctor of the Abbot therefore begs

that the Pope will prohibit all attacks on the Abbey, and declare void all censure or excommunication that might be inflicted on St Albans.¹ This petition was successful; and the same day a Papal Bull was issued fully granting the protection asked for, pending the appeal and until such time as a definite sentence had been pronounced upon it.²

The prosecution of the appeal was not delayed, and the taking of the evidence was committed "to Masters Jerome de Porcariis and Francis Bruno, two chaplains of the Auditors of Causes" before the Holy See. The judges thus appointed acted with great promptitude, and decided that if St. Albans was allowed in this case to plead its exemption, other religious houses might be led to follow the example thus set by it, and also refuse to submit to visitation. They therefore advised the Pope to make special

¹ Vat. Arch. Reg. Suppl. 913, fol. lxviii.

² Vat. Arch. Reg. Inn. VIII., anno 6°. vol. 893, fol. 1^b.

provision in this matter, and for this time to suspend the admitted privileges. Consequently on July 30, 1490, another Bull was issued by Pope Innocent VIII. addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury. In this document, after reciting the general faculties of visitation and correction of religious houses already granted to the Archbishop of Canterbury at the request of the King of England, the Pope goes on to say that it had lately been represented to him that certain of the English monasteries, "and in particular St. Albans, and the house ruled over by a Prior, which was called St. Andrew's, Northampton," had refused to admit the Archbishop's right of visitation on the plea of a privilege of exemption granted by various Popes. They had appealed to the Holy See, and on the advice of the judges appointed to hear the appeal, he (the Pope), to put an end to the dispute and because "the King has humbly petitioned for it, granted by this Bull *special*

faculties to the Archbishop to hold the visitation in question, notwithstanding all rights and privileges possessed by those houses." Archbishop Morton in order to carry out this order was empowered if necessary to invoke the help of the secular arm.¹

So far as Rome is concerned this is the end of the matter. It does not require much knowledge of the methods of the Apostolic Curia to see that there was no possibility of any appeal from a deliberate judgment given in a papal Bull, and the Abbot of St. Albans, had he wished, could not have carried the case further. *Roma locuta est, causa finita.* What exactly was settled would appear to be this: the right of the Archbishop to hold the visitation of St. Albans in virtue of the general faculties he had received was given in favour of the Abbey. As a matter of practical politics, however, and at the special request of the English King, special

¹ Vat. Arch. Reg. Lat. vol. 884, f. 127.

faculties were given to him by the above-named Bull to put an end to the dispute.

What exactly Archbishop Morton did or did not do, when he received these faculties to hold the visitation, if necessary by calling to his aid the secular power, is most unfortunately very obscure. Some slight information seems to be contained in the obituary notice of Abbot Wallingford. This remarkable document would serve well for the exercise of students in the higher criticism. It embodies at least three historical papers regarding Abbot Wallingford, drawn up at different times and obviously for some special purpose. Reference has been made to one of these documents which is dated in 1484, and which gives us the testimony of the Prior and Community as to the character and worth of their Abbot. A second document is dated in 1490, the year be it remarked of the *Monitio* addressed by Archbishop Morton, containing his catalogue of reported abuses at St. Albans

which called for redress, and the year also of the final and wise decision of the Pope, that in spite of all privileges the Archbishop was to see to this matter as he thought fit. It seems more than probable that the catalogue of all that their Abbot, —their *pius et optimus Pater*, as they call him—had done for his house in his office of trust, before his becoming Abbot, was the prelude to the declaration of what had been effected up to the year 1490, during the fourteen years of his abbacy. This is a free translation of what Prior Thomas Ramridge says in the special passage in question: “I will here say and plainly declare that he was afterwards (*i.e.*, after holding the office of Prior, &c.) elected Abbot, that is to say by unanimous agreement (*pacto, per Spiritus Sancti viam*). After taking upon himself this office, and in the few years that have passed since, that is fourteen,¹ he has paid £1830 for

¹ Wallingford was elected Abbot in 1476, so that this would have been written in 1490.

the debts of his predecessor, as clearly appears in the account of his Official. Moreover, we must add to this that most ornate, splendid and lofty screen of the high altar, which adds greatly to the beauty of the church, delights the eyes of those who examine it, and which is to all seeing it the most wonderful work of art in the kingdom ; the cost of this reached the sum of 1100 marks."

What was the purpose of this declaration at this precise time ? It can hardly be questioned that it has some relation to Archbishop Morton's *Monitio*. In reply to the reports mentioned by Morton that their Abbot was a spendthrift, dissipating the goods of his Monastery, the monks brought forward proof to the contrary and showed that probably none of his many predecessors had done anything like as much for the Abbey. With this declaration of 1490, there can be little doubt, the document drawn up six years before, in 1484, was incorporated, as

both subsequently were in the obituary notice of Abbot Wallingford.

The document as it stands is a categorical denial of many of the evil reports, which Morton says had reached his ears about Saint Albans. The declaration of the entire Community, given under the Convent seal, that collectively and individually they held Wallingford in veneration, as a *piissimus et optimus Pater*: the catalogue they furnished of all that he had done for the material welfare of his Abbey, and in all how "useful and beloved" he had been to his brethren: and their appeal to the account book of his officials in proof of his having spent a very large sum in clearing off the debts of his predecessor, was, there can be little doubt, sent to the Archbishop as the joint reply of the Community to the calumnious reports. The date, 1490, seems to make it certain that it was used in connection with the *Monitio* of Archbishop Morton. What was the re-

sult? Unfortunately there is little evidence to guide us. The last leaves of Wallingford's Register have been torn away, and there is no entry beyond the *Monitio* in that of Morton. To some extent, therefore, we are left to conjecture. The Archbishop had been granted full powers to satisfy himself about St. Albans, and therefore the result was absolutely in his hands. If he made the visitation, and after enquiry left things as they were, leaving Abbot Wallingford still in office, most people will regard this as sufficient evidence that he certainly did not find St. Albans in the terrible state which the reports of which he speaks had led him to suppose.

On reflection, however, it seems to me more probable that he never really held the visitation at all, but was satisfied, by the solemn testimony of the entire Community, that Wallingford was not the evil ruler he had been represented to be by his calumniators, and that he had only

got to look "in every corner" of St. Albans to see what the Abbot had done in buildings and repairs, or to search into the accounts to find what debts he had paid off in the fourteen years of his abbacy. It will be remembered that Archbishop Morton in his *Monitio* proposed to make a visitation only if he were not assured that what was said to be amiss should be immediately corrected. It seems, therefore, not unlikely that this declaration of the whole Community as to their entire trust in Wallingford, and their personal belief in him as a good man and able administrator, together with the proofs brought forward that he was no reckless squanderer of monastic property, &c., satisfied the Archbishop that he had been misled by listening too readily to evil and malicious reports. Having gained his point in Rome, on receiving the testimony of the monks he seems to have been content to let the matter rest.

One thing is certain, namely, that

things remained at St. Albans what they were. With every power to depose Abbot Wallingford if he were satisfied that matters were as bad as they were reported to be, Archbishop Morton left him to rule the Abbey. The ordinary and natural interpretation of this fact is that on further enquiry and reflection he came to the conclusion that the evil reports were, in fact, untrue.

Wallingford died in June 1492, for on the 29th of that month King Henry VII. gave the Community licence to choose a successor.¹ On September 16th of the same year the Royal assent was given to the choice of "Thomas Ramridge, formerly Prior of St. Albans," as Abbot "in place of William Wallingford, late Abbot."² As to this choice it may be useful to note that it is itself a presumption against the truth of the slanderous reports catalogued in Morton's *Monitio*. As all know that the

¹ Rot. Pat. 7 H. VII., m. 34.

² Rot. Pat. 8 H. VII., m. 3[18].

discipline in a great Abbey such as St. Albans is mainly in the hands of the Prior, and if the condition of the Abbey was really as bad as these rumours would have us believe, the blame must fall quite as much upon Ramridge as upon Wallingford. Yet it is this Ramridge who, two years after the date of Morton's letter, is chosen to succeed him, and whose election is confirmed by the king.

The obit of Abbot Wallingford, which on the anniversary of his death was read out during the latter part of the office of Prime to the Community, then all assembled for the daily Chapter, is an unusually long document. It has been already referred to as incorporating documents, which were drawn up for certain reasons in the years 1484 and 1490. In 1492, upon Wallingford's death, certain portions were added, and although the entire document is long, it may be here translated.

“ We now come to recall to our memory

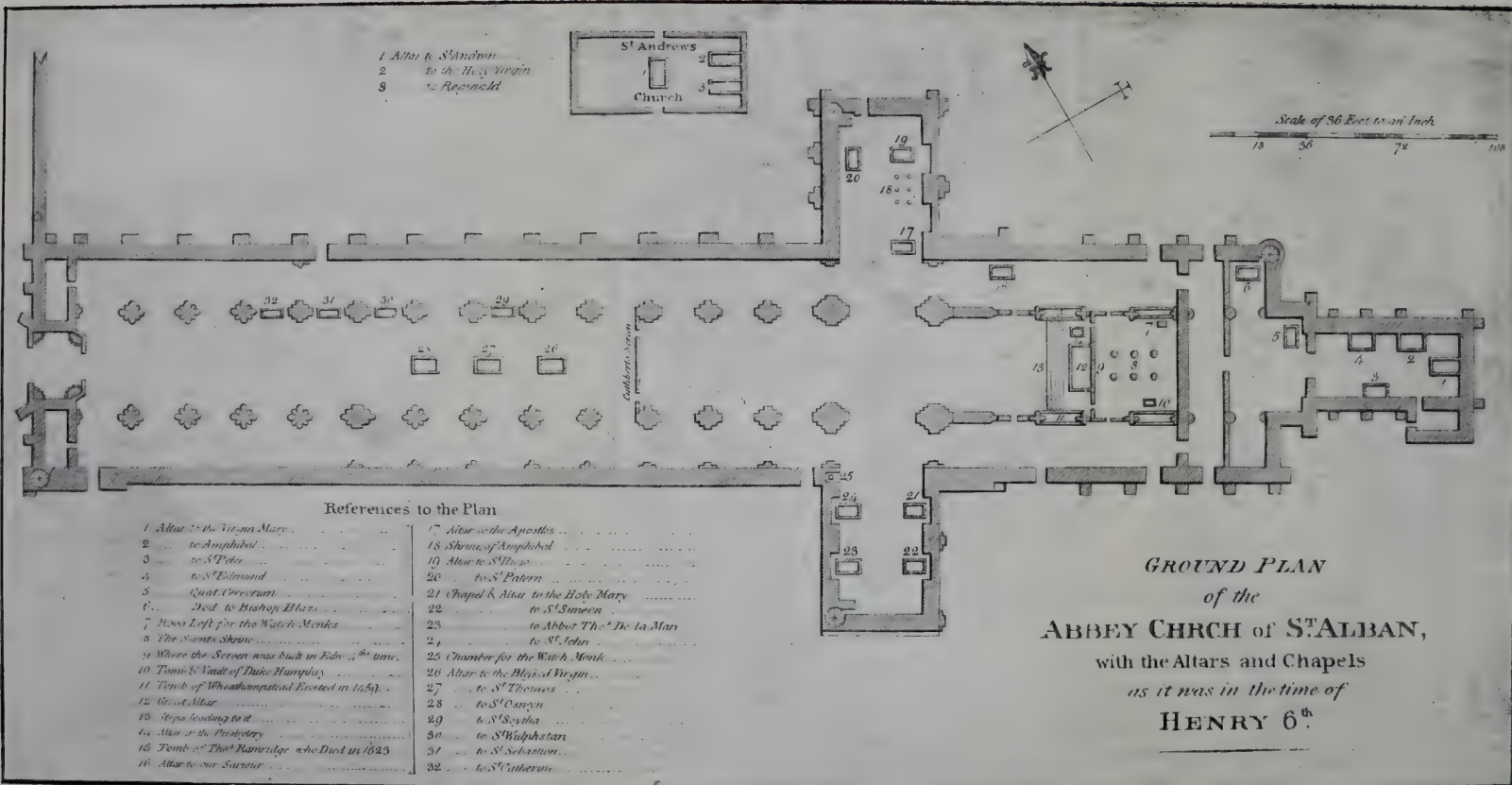
the principal loving acts and noble and sumptuous works of our late venerable Father and Abbot the Lord William Wallingford. We set down what and how much this loving and best of Fathers began and accomplished most devotedly in this place at his great expense. These works, indeed, are apparent and abound in every part and corner of this holy house. It would, indeed, take much too long a time were we to describe these works and relate all he had done; still, for his praise, and as an example to others, we will here briefly set down some of his deeds:—

“ First then, whilst he was Archdeacon of this Monastery, for God’s service and out of reverence for holy religion he supported and educated ten young religious out of his own revenues and at great expense. Also he set up many fine new buildings in many parts of our monastery; as for example the noble library and kitchen of stone. Further he

gave a sumptuous gilt chalice and two cruets, and glazed the windows and caused pictures to be painted in many parts of the church. Also it was his goodness and liberality which repaired many of the monastic offices, making many tumble-down places to appear as new.

“ Many most precious ornaments he also bestowed on this Monastery and (amongst others) the finest cloth of gold. From this cloth of gold were wonderfully worked the copes, tunicles and dalmatics, which to-day we use to the great glory of God ; for no other Monastery in England possesses finer. If any one would know the true value of all these things the sum total is 980 marks.

“ Then after he was made Prior, at the same time holding the office of kitchener, he paid for the (latter) office, then greatly in debt, £360 of English money. Also he expended for various repairs of farms, houses and other (buildings) belonging to the office of kitchener, in the space of eight





years, 1000 marks, and notwithstanding all these expenses and repairs he built up the Prior's hall and furnished it with all things necessary.

“ Here, moreover, I will speak of and plainly show that he was afterwards elected as Abbot by acclamation (of the Community, *pacto per viam Spiritus*), and having taken the pastoral office, in the few years that have passed since, that is fourteen (*i.e.*, 1490), he paid the debts of his predecessor, as is clearly proved by the accounts of his official, to the amount of £1830. In addition to this he set up that most ornamental, sumptuous and lofty screen of the high altar, which is a great glory to the church, pleasantly delights the eyes of all who see it, and to all examining it is the most wonderful work in the kingdom.

“ Then, it is no light praise for him to have finished our Chapter House at his great cost, for he spent on it £1000. Then he arranged for the making of two

windows in the church, one in the north part near the Sacristy, the other in the southern part near the clock ; on these he expended £100. Beyond this, for the purchase of lands (to endow) a perpetual Mass in honour of the name of Jesus every Friday for ever, and for a daily Mass for his own soul, the celebrant each day to receive 5d. ; and this expense came to £100. Also he paid £60 for a mitre and two pastoral staves.

“ Also for the building of his Chapel and tomb on the south near the High Altar, with railings and marble slab with the figure on it, with other ornaments of the Chapel, he expended £100.

“ Moreover, we should not forget what great costs and heavy burdens he sustained in his old age when he strenuously defended the liberties and immunities of this Monastery against the Archbishop and High Chancellor of England. He valiantly and manfully resisted and appealed to Rome. He sent his monk John Thornton

to Rome and cited the Archbishop and his Dean of Arches to appear. In the end, this our best and most Reverend Father and most worthy Abbot obtained a just victory, and preserved intact and inviolate all our privileges, to our great honour and utility. May God and St. Alban, our patron, here and everywhere be praised.

“What is, moreover, most wonderful, praiseworthy and memorable is, that our best of Fathers after so many and such great expenses, after such an immense number of works, left his Monastery free and without the least debt: although for many years in buildings and lawsuits and many other things he had spent so great a sum of money for the honour and liberty of the Monastery.

“The total sum of money expended on all the above-named burdens and benefits by the foresaid Right Rev. Father, William Wallingford, for the benefit of this Monastery, both when he held the

offices of Cellarer, Archdeacon, Prior and Cook, as well as in the days of his Abbacy and Pastoral dignity, is £8600, 7s. 6d.

“And in testimony of all the foresaid, and as a brilliant example to all to come, we, Thomas Ramridge, then Prior, and we the other Fathers and brethren, conventuals of this Monastery, signify the truth to all men by our common seal, and by the unanimous consent of all of us collectively, and assent of each individually, by this private writing we testify that all these things were lovingly and benignly accomplished and done by the said most worthy Father, in the year of Our Lord 1484, the 8th day of the month of August.

“From the foregoing we can see most clearly how useful and how beloved he has been to his Monastery. Wherefore all of us with true hearts devoutly pray day and night to the Almighty God for him, and that he may deign to give him

a fitting reward in heaven for his deeds on earth. Amen."

It seems inconceivable that this description of the character of Abbot Wallingford, and these details of his benefactions, could have been entered in the Obit Book of St. Albans, and publicly read each year in Chapter, if they were not substantially true. The entire Community of over sixty members knew the truth of the facts, and had their former Abbot been the perjured villain and the reckless spendthrift he is represented by some to have been, the public reading of this laudatory document would have been imprudent and impossible.

It is time, however, to consider the other point of view. I take that of Dr. James Gairdner in the Introduction to the third volume of *Lollardy and the Reformation* (pp. xxx. seqq.).

"Abbot Wallingford is, indeed, praised by the monks as one who, besides paying off in fourteen years the heavy debts of

his predecessor, did a number of magnificent things on behalf of the Abbey—among others, presented it with a splendid altar screen which exists there even now. But if it be true,¹ as stated in Archbishop Morton's letter, that he cut down the wood of the Monastery to the value of 8000 marks, the explanation seems to be that he paid the debts of the house out of capital, and reduced the value of a magnificent property to make things comfortable for the existing generation of monks.² In that case he grossly abused his official trust; and unfortunately there are records of his previous history as a monk which agree only too

¹ *If it be true*: this is the whole matter. On the one hand we have the positive testimony of the entire Community as to the administration of Wallingford: On the other what Morton gives as "a report": Morton does not *state* that *he cut down the wood*, but that he hears *reports* that he had done so.

² There is no evidence of any kind that the value of the property was thus diminished. The very opposite would be gathered from the testimony of the Community as to the excellent administration of Abbot Wallingford.

well with this hypothesis. For he was a trustee¹ of Abbot Stoke, a covetous man who, against the rules of the Order,² had accumulated a private hoard, and after Stoke's death he was called to account by Abbot Whethamstede for attempted embezzlement. Abbot Whethamstede, indeed, once charged him to his face with perjury, and was only persuaded not to dismiss him from various offices of trust by the intercession of influential noblemen, whose friendship the culprit had cultivated like a man of the world."³

¹ *Trustee* is hardly the word to use of a man who is said merely to have known where certain money had been placed.

² There does not appear to be any reason to defame the memory of Abbot Stoke. Dr. Gairdner evidently does not know that the revenues of St. Albans, and indeed of all the great houses, were divided for the support of the various offices. The Abbot, who was constantly called upon to meet royal taxation, &c., had a large revenue, and because he died with a certain amount of money, which he had intended to spend on certain works for the Abbey, it is hardly just to speak of his having "accumulated a private hoard."

³ The whole of this account is founded upon the document printed as *Registrum Abbatie J. Whetham-*

“Yet after Abbot Whethamstede and his successor William Albon¹ had passed away, this William Wallingford was actually elected Abbot himself,² with what results to the Monastery Archbishop Morton’s letter *shows too clearly*,³ and the further information which Abbot Gasquet has obtained for us from the Vatican archives—though he appears not

stede, which the Editor, Mr. Riley, characterises as a “structure of calumny and vituperation” which had “no place in the Abbot’s Register,” and “was devised for a purpose which, though not avowed, it is not so very difficult to devise.” “*In the cause of truth and honour, good feeling and good faith*,” writes Mr. Riley, “we have no option left but to believe that this narrative, so far from being written by the Abbot, never even came before his eyes.” Dr. Gairdner has here trusted to the guidance of Mr. Froude, rather than to that of Mr. Riley, and accepted the document as sober history.

¹ Abbot Albon continued Wallingford in his offices and made him his Prior.

² Dr. Gairdner does not say “by the *unanimous* vote of his brethren.”

³ This letter of itself *proves* or *shows* nothing whatever. It simply states a series of reports, which apparently were never examined into.

to have seen it in that light¹—helps, I think, rather to set forth a crowning triumph of worldliness over religion. Abbot Wallingford knew beforehand what efforts not only Archbishop Morton but King Henry VII. were making at Rome to punish his misconduct, and he actually succeeded in frustrating them.²

“He knew the ways of Rome at least as well as they did, and he set himself from the first to preserve inviolate the exemption of the Abbey from all Episcopal jurisdiction.³ As early as the 6th February 1490, he had procured from Innocent VIII. a brief addressed to the Archbishop desiring him to protect the Abbot and monks

¹ This much is certainly true.

² This is absolutely contrary to the “information” I obtained from the Vatican archives. The Pope expressly permitted the visitation to take place under the circumstances, although it was against the privileges of the Abbey.

³ It would be strange indeed if the Abbot did not exert himself to preserve the privileges of the Abbey, seeing that he had taken an oath to do so at the time of his election.

from all interference with their privileges. On the 5th July, however, Morton having already obtained a Bull empowering him to visit exempt Monasteries¹ (though it was chiefly those with foreign heads), addressed that letter to the Abbot, in which the charges are expressed. But the Abbot had his proctor in Rome and appealed against the right of the Archbishop to hold a visitation.² On the 30th July, however, the Pope, at the King of England's earnest solicitation, granted the Archbishop special faculties to override objection raised to his visitation, both by the Abbey of St. Albans and by the Priory of Northampton. But there *must have been* one more move upon the chessboard, of which Abbot Gasquet does *not seem to* have come upon any notice at Rome.³ For the victory

¹ This did not affect the privileges of St. Albans, which included exemption from all general powers of visitation, unless expressly named in them.

² As he was bound to do by virtue of his oath.

³ I feel constrained to protest against the phrase *does*

remained at last with St. Albans, which Wallingford succeeded by great efforts in preserving from the dreaded visitation,¹ and surely no worse account could well be given of the Court of Rome than is implied by such a termination of the case;² and surely no worse account could be given of the Abbey of St. Albans than the way the result was recorded.”³

not seem, &c. I informed Dr. Gairdner that there were no more documents to be found, and his expression has been taken by many to mean that I knew of a later document and had suppressed it. To any one who knows the procedure of the Roman Courts a Bull of a Pope determining a cause is final. There is no appeal from the Pope to the Pope.

¹ This statement is absolutely without foundation. There is no proof that the Visit was not held or the case settled in the way suggested before, p. 60.

² This judgment is founded upon Dr. Gairdner's mere supposition, which has no warrant in fact. All that the historian has to guide him in the way of documents tends to show that the Pope acted with the utmost honesty and prudence. He even suspended the privileges, which he had himself fully confirmed, to allow the Archbishop to hold the visitation asked for.

³ Reg. J. Whethamstede I. App. the *Obit Book*, p. 478.

“Moreover, we ought not to be unmindful how great most serious expenses and heaviest charges”—the translator must endeavour to do justice to the redundancy of the original language—“he sustained in his old age, when he diligently took action against the Archbishop of Canterbury, Great Chancellor of England, for the defence of the liberties and immunities of this Monastery, and when he manfully resisted his power and great strength (*illius potentia et magnis viribus*). He appealed even to Rome, &c. as in the Obit previously given.¹

¹ Abbot Wallingford certainly did oppose the visitation which Cardinal Morton proposed to make. In view of the oath taken by him to preserve inviolate all the privileges of his house, it is difficult to see what else he could have done. Dr. Gairdner's strictures are based on the pure supposition that the visitation ordered by the Pope was defeated subsequently by this wicked (!) Abbot by means of his Roman agents. There is nothing in the documents to warrant this assumption. The ultimate judgment of the Pope is contained in the letter ordering the visitation, even, if necessary, by invoking the secular arm. The praise recorded in the Obit naturally refers to the confirmation of all the

“Such” (continues Dr Gairdner) “was the actual working,¹ in this particular instance of an old, complicated and corrupt system. As many zealous reformers, who, like Dean Colet, were still loyal to that system, said about the state of the Church in their day, that there was no lack of good laws to correct abuses if they were only properly enforced. But then how were they to be enforced when there was so much corruption? Good men did not see their way to a remedy. In this case the zeal of the highest prelate in England, aided by all the influence of England’s King at the Court of Rome—which was always very considerable, though the Church’s freedom from State control was theoretically absolute—could do nothing to avert the triumph of a powerful and wealthy Abbot, privileges, which Wallingford secured as at least one result of his difficulties in regard to this visitation, which was allowed merely as an exception.

¹ Not “*actual*,” but the “*working*” *supposed* by Dr. Gairdner.

who had shamefully misgoverned the Community over which he presided, and made it a source of moral contagion to the neighbourhood," &c.

Where are we? Is this really regarded by Dr. Gairdner as "history"? History must be founded on *facts*, and deductions must be based upon facts and not upon mere prejudice. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the King of England did get what they asked for. This much is certain, by the papal Bull. Dr. Gairdner assumes, without any warrant of fact, and indeed against the certain practice of the Roman Curia, that wicked Abbot Wallingford purchased and coerced the Pope into withdrawing this Bull. This view may be suggested by prejudice, but it is not historical. He further assumes that the visitation was never made in any shape or form, because he assumes the truth of the reports contained in Cardinal Morton's letter, quite as certainly as Mr. Froude, who declared that the letter contained a

record of what the Cardinal found to be true after full examination. The only safe guide in history is to abide by the facts and by the facts only, and this case of Cardinal Morton and St. Albans as represented by Dr. Gairdner is a very good illustration how even so excellent an historian, to whom the entire world is so much indebted, may stray from the path of history into the realms of romance once the sign-posts of facts have been disregarded.

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